DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 345 212 CS 010 934

AUTHOR Lancy, David F.; Bergin, Christi
TITLE The Role of Parents in Supporting Beginning Reading.
PUB DATE Apr 92
NOTE 25p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (73rd, San Francisco, CA, April 20-24, 1992).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Beginning Reading; Grade 1; Kindergarten; *Parent Child Relationship; Parent Education; *Parent Role; Primary Education; *Reading Aloud to Others; Reading Research
IDENTIFIERS Communication Behavior; *Emergent Literacy

ABSTRACT

A study examined parents' contributions to the emerging reading abilities of kindergarten and first-grade children by documenting the variation in parent-child interaction during joint storybook reading and the specific interaction patterns associated with children's reading fluency and affect. Subjects, 32 white, working-class parent-child pairs were videotaped for 30 to 40 minutes while reading to each other from a varied collection of picture books. An elaborate coding scheme was developed to analyze both parent and child behaviors. Results indicated that: (1) parents interpreted the mandate to read to their children in a wide variety of ways; (2) the way parents corrected reading errors and their apparent purpose for reading was associated with both the child's reading fluency and affect; (3) the number of error corrections and questions answered were not related to reading fluency or affect; and (4) the number of comments made while reading was not related to fluency. Results showed that parent-child pairs who view the child's reading as fun, keep the story flowing by using semantic-oriented rather than decoding-oriented correction tactics, encourage questions about the story and express humor while reading have children who are more fluent and more positive about reading. Findings underscore the need for educators to convey information to parents about how to be a good coach to the beginning reader, rather than just telling parents and children to read at home more. (Three tables and two figures of data are included; 37 references are attached.) (RS)

The Role of Parents in Supporting Beginning Reading[1]

David F. Lancy & Christi Bergin[2]

University of Toledo
Center for Applied Cognitive Science
Gillham Hall
Toledo, Ohio 43606

April 1992 draft.
Not to be copied without permission of authors.

---

[1] Portions of this paper were presented at the Emergent Literacy conference at the University of Toledo, in May 1991, at the joint SRCD/ACYF/NCJW conference in Washington D.C., June 1991 and will be presented at the AERA conference in San Francisco in April, 1992.

[2] Kelly Draper was responsible for data collection and co-authored an earlier paper dealing with a global analysis of the data.

The Role of Parents in Supporting Beginning Reading

INTRODUCTION

Many innovative early childhood intervention programs as well as school-initiated parent-involvement programs urge parents to read to and with their children. Policy in this area has been influenced by research that shows that children who learn to read easily and at an early age are read to at home (Durkin, 1966; Teale, 1987; Elardo, Bradley & Caldwell, 1975; Wachs, Uzgiris, & Hunt, 1971; Walker & Keurbitz, 1979; Wells, 1981, 1985). Home reading is also positively correlated with vocabulary and language development (Gordon & Guinagh, 1974; Irwin, 1960).

Social class variation in parental contribution to reading acquisition has been found. For example, the availability and function of reading and writing materials varies widely across families (Anderson, Teale, & Estrada, 1980; Teale, 1978; Teale, Estrada & Anderson, 1981) and regular storybook reading routines are not as prevalent in low income homes (Teale, 1986). Apparently the home literacy environment, in general, and the presence of storybook reading rituals, in particular, mediates the child's experience of and success with literacy instruction in school (Lancy, in press).

As a result of these two lines of research, there has been a spate of new programs (e.g., *Running Start* --Lancy & Zupsic, 1991) designed to get parents to read to their children, particularly those at risk for reading problems. Thanks to the media it has become common knowledge among parents that children should be read to at home. The weak link in this process is that educators are not telling parents how to read to their children. Not all parents may be interested in or have the skill to read effectively to their child and/or serve as an effective coach for the child that is just beginning to read. Popular media ads encourage parents to "turn your child on to books," yet parents could potentially have the opposite effect. What constitutes supportive and nonsupportive home reading practices for the beginning reader?

There is a dearth of research on parent-child reading in the early elementary years to provide an answer to such a question. It is an important question because easy acquisition and enjoyment of reading in the early grades should facilitate subsequent academic development. The objective of this study is to begin to fill this research void. We address parents' contributions to the emerging reading abilities of kindergarten and first grade children by documenting (1) the variation in parent-child interaction during joint storybook reading, and (2) specific interaction patterns associated with children's reading fluency and affect.

METHOD

Not only is this study unique in age of the subjects, but also in their fluency range. Children were in kindergarten or first-grade. As each child reached the ability to begin to read books independently, as judged by the classroom teacher, a parent [3] was invited to come to the school to read with the child in a simulated home setting. Subjects were carefully selected to achieve a range from early (reading independently in Kindergarten) to late (still struggling near the end of First grade) readers. Thirty-two white, working-class parent-child pairs were videotaped for 30-40 minutes while reading to each other from a varied collection of picture books. The pairs freely choose which book to read and who would do the reading. All pairs included some parent-to-child reading and some child-to-parent reading.

A global analysis of these data has already been reported (Lancy, Draper & Boyce, 1989). In that analysis we reviewed the videotapes to determine whether there were any general patterns in the storybook reading behavior of parents and children. We detected a trend whereby the parents of early readers tended to use an *expansionist* strategy while the parents of late readers were more likely to use a *reductionist* strategy. In this paper we report results from a more fine-grained analysis of these tapes.

Independent Variables

An elaborate coding scheme was developed to analyze both parent and child behaviors. To determine what limitations on the reliability of the data might be due to observer error, inter-observer agreement was calculated based on the videotapes of four parent-child pairs. In all but one case, percent of complete agreement was the statistic used, resulting in very conservative estimates of agreement because this statistic is stringent and doesn't allow for "close" measures in categorical data.

Independent variables under study included:

1. Parent's error correction tactics
2. Commentary on the books
3. Child's asking of questions about the book
4. Purpose for reading

Parents' error correction tactics are important at this age because children make many mistakes--the single most frequent kind of parent-child interaction was the correction of the child's reading errors--but the literature currently is mute on this issue. The next three variables were included because studies show that discussion of the book, asking open-

---

[3] In fact, we invited parents or "any person who reads to _____at home" to come to school. We had one mother/father pair, a grandmother, a grandfather, one father and 28 mothers.

ended questions, and stressing meaning facilitate literacy development in preschool-age children.

Dependent Variables

There are two dependent variables under study here: (1) fluency and (2) reading affect.

Fluency Group

Two factors were taken into account when children were placed into fluency groups: (1) Number of words read per minute and (2) Age of the child.

Number of Words Read per Minute

At two different points in the observation session (beginning and middle) the number of words the child read in a three minute period was tallied. Number of words read ranged, across the group, from 9 to 153. The two data points were averaged to obtain a per minute fluency rate for each child. In addition, at the end of the session the observer rated the child as high, medium or low in fluency so that the kind of book read (easy reader vs. difficult narrative) could be taken into account. Both the count and rating data were used to rank the children's fluency.

Age of the Child

Because the children were selected for study only when the teacher felt they had become "independent readers", the age and time of year for testing varied for each child. We designated children as either early or late readers based on both their age and the time of year of observation. "Early" readers were in kindergarten or the first part of first grade and were 5-5 to 6-9 years old. "Late" readers were in the second half of first grade and were 6-0 to 7-6 years old.

Originally these age and fluency dimensions were combined as follows:

1. Early, high fluency N=6
2. Early, medium fluency N=4
3. Early, low fluency N=5
4. Late, high fluency N=6
5. Late, medium fluency N=6
6. Late, low fluency N=5

However, the small cell sizes made it impossible to conduct some of the later analyses. Also, in later analyses we found that groups 1, 2, and 4 performed similarly, while groups 3, 5, and 6 performed similarly, such that the results were not only in the same direction, they were often the same effect size if we pooled the data and conducted analyses on only two groups: (1) Good readers; children who were fluent and early (median age of 6-2 and median fluency ranking of 8th with words-per-minute read ranging from 44 to 124) and (2)

Poor readers: children who were nonfluent and late (median age of 6-10 and median ranking of 24th with words-per-minute read ranging from 17 to 53). Both groups had an N of 16. The two observers had 100% agreement on fluency grouping.

Affect Group

The second dependent variable cluster reflected the attitude of the child toward reading as seen in the display of affect during our observations. Affect group was constructed from a composite of the following five variables: (1) frustration (2) task engagement (3) discipline (4) subdued affect and (5) weariness at the end of the session. These variables were derived from repeated viewings of the video tape, they are *grounded* in the data (Lancy, 1992). Furthermore, the variables were repeatedly reworked in order to get the best fit to the data. We will, of necessity, report descriptive statistics on these variables in this section rather than the results section.

The Individual Variables

1. Frustration. At three points (beginning, middle and end) during the observation we rated on a scale of 1 (low) to 6 (high) the child's display of frustration while reading. At each point of measurement the children were evenly distributed from low to high on the scale with a mean of 3 and range of 1 to 6 indicating wide variation in frustration level.

We then placed each child in one of five categories describing the pattern of frustration as the session progressed:

1. Frustration stays low
2. Frustration stays moderate
3. Frustration stays high
4. Frustration gets lower
5. Frustration gets higher

One might expect beginning readers to grow in frustration as the session wore on but there was no such pattern for the group as a whole. The majority of children (25 of 32) stayed in a stable pattern as follows: 12 children stayed low, 8 stayed high, and 5 stayed moderate. Another 5 children became more and 2 became less frustrated.

2. Task Engagement. We repeated this procedure with task engagement also using a rating scale of 1 (low) to 6 (high). The children were fairly evenly divided in degree of task engagement with a mean of 3 and range of 1 to 6 but slightly more children were at the lowest end of engagement at all three measurement times.

Just as with frustration, the majority (26 of 32) of children were stable in engagement across the session; 13 children stayed low, 5 stayed high, and 8 stayed moderate. Half of the remaining 6 children became more engaged, half, less so.

3. Discipline & Distraction. We tallied each incident of discipline and distraction that occured during the reading session. Discipline sanctions included verbal or non-verbal methods to get the child's attention back to reading when it had wandered. Examples range from "Come on, let's finish", or "Concentrate. Don't fidget about so much" in gentle tones, to the mother swiftly slapping the child. Distraction sanctions were aimed at controlling non-reading behavior, such as "Quit picking your nose."

Across the group number of discipline sanctions ranged from 0 to 14. Fourteen children had none. For 12 children there were one or two sanctions. The remaining children were sanctioned from four to six times, one child having 14. Distraction sanctions (one or two) occured in only 4 sessions, and these children were above the mode in frequency of discipline. Distraction and discipline episodes were summed to produce a single variable. Almost all instances (47 of 56) of discipline and distraction occured in the first three books read. Thus, the frequency of sanctions can not be simply explained by the growing weariness on the part of the child as the session progressed, but is more likely a reflection of parent-child interaction style.

4. Subdued Affect. We rated whether each child showed subdued affect using a coding scheme developed by a group of researchers at Stanford (Feldman, Wentzel, Weinberger, & Munson, 1990). This item asked whether the child's affect display appeared "flat" or showed a lack of emotional energy. Ratings ranged from 5 (nuetral, blunted affect not seen) to 1 (highly subdued). To recieve a "5" a child does not have to be percolating with energy, but rather have no sign of subdued affect. This rating was only slightly skewed, with subjects evenly distributed over 2, 3, 4, and 5.

5. Weariness. We categorized each child at the end of the session as to whether they were predominantly weary, neutral or still enjoying reading. Most children (17) were rated as weary, six as enjoying the reading, and nine as neutral by the end of the session.

We also categorized parent's weariness in the way we did the child's. Parents were similar; 17 were weary, seven still enjoying themselves and eight neutral by the end of the session. We did not use parent's weariness as a part of the dependent variable here because we were interested in the child's attitude, not the parent's. The child's level of weariness did not necessarily predict the parent's -- only fifteen of the parents had the same rating as the child. However, parents' weariness category was related to fluency of the child.

The Affect Groups

These five variables are associated with one another; of the 16 children who appear to be most negative in reading affect, 15 of them are at or below the median in their scores on four of the five variables. Of the 16 children who appear to be most positive in reading affect 12 are at or above the median in four of the five variables. Discipline and weariness

ratings were the least empirically related to the other variables, but they were skewed variables with a strong floor effect.

The two variables most centrally related to the others are frustration and engagement level. If these two variables are analyzed without regard to the other variables, three prevailing patterns emerge. Each child was either low in frustration and high in engagement (n=7) (i.e., enthusiastically working) or high in frustration and low in engagement (n=15) (i.e., having a lousy time) or low in frustration and low to moderate in engagement (n=8) (i.e., tuned out). Note that almost half the children are having a lousy time.

Weariness is related to frustration in that children who stayed high in frustration were ALL weary by the end of the session while children who remained low in frustration varied in weariness. Discipline was assumed to be related to level of engagement in the task because children occasionally used off-task behavior purposely to avoid reading. This is difficult to assess because of the floor effect of the discipline variable (i.e., most children had no discipline sanctions), but a trend appears to confirm this assumption; 2/3 of the children who were low or became lower in engagement were sanctioned whereas only 1/4 of the children who were high or became higher in engagement were.

If we look at these five variables together, four groups emerge with the following pattern:

1. Negative group (N=8). These children are moderate to high in frustration and parental sanctions, moderate to low in engagement, show subdued affect, weariness at the end of the session, and are in the bottom third for four or more of the contributing five variables. Thus, this group is showing considerable negative affect.

2. Moderately negative group (N=9). These children are high in frustration, moderate to high in sanctions, moderate to low in engagement and show weariness at the end of the session. Their affect rating varies across the spectrum. They are in the bottom third on more variables than they are in the top third of. Thus, this group displays moderately negative affect.

3. Neutral group (N=7). These children are moderate to low in frustration and engagement, they show some signs of subdued affect, and are sanctioned rarely or never. Their scores on weariness vary. They are in the top third on more variables than in the bottom third. Thus this group is showing neither negative nor positive affect. They are "tuned out."

4. Positive group (N=8). These children are moderate to low in frustration and are not weary at the end of the session. They are moderate to high in engagement, are never sanctioned, and show no signs of blunted affect. They are in the top third in four of the

five contributing variables. Thus, this group is up-beat and are positive on all or most affect dimensions.

The key difference between groups 1 and 2 is that, in group 2, we see negative affect, but it is less extreme or less marked than in group 1. The key difference between groups 2 and 3 is that group 3 is low in frustration. The key difference between groups 3 and 4 is that group 4 is high in engagement level and affect. The two observers had 100% agreement on affect grouping.

RESULTS

First,we should note that the child's affect and fluency are not strongly related. A comparison of extremes shows that of the six youngest and most fluent readers, none are in the negative group. Conversely, of the five oldest, least fluent readers, none are in the positive group. However, good and poor readers are found in nearly all affect groups. Thus, the relationship with each independent variable will be presented separately for the two dependent variables.

Parent's Error Correction Tactics

There is a dearth of research regarding the parent's response to the child's reading errors. Yet, in this study, it became clear that the single most frequent kind of interaction that occured between parent and child was error correction. For these pairs, reading was clearly a negotiated event. It follows that how the parent makes these corrections would have an effect on the child's reading abilities and attitudes.

We tallied the number and type of corrections following each of the child's errors. We also included hesitations when the child made a clear signal for help (e.g., looking at the mother with eyebrows raised). Seven categories emerged ranging from simply saying "No" to telling the child the word while elaborating a general principle. The categories were:

1. Simply saying "No."
2. Isolating the error, but not offering any other help.

   Example: "What's this word right here?" while pointing.
3. Asking the child to sound the word out without aid.

   Example: "Don't guess. Pronounce it."
4. Asking the child to sound the word out with aid.

   Example: "No, that's a 'b.' There's no 't'."
5. Giving a whole-word clue involving picture or text.

   Example: "What do ears do?" (for the word 'hear') or "Look at the picutre."
6. Simply telling the child the word.
7. Telling the child the word and elaborating on the relevant rule.

Example: "No, that's not waterlemon, it's watermelon. Same letters, but see the order is different."

Parental responses that involved a combination of these categories were coded in one of two ways. (1) A single statement that crossed several categories was assigned to the category reflecting the provision of greater assistance to the child. For example, "No, not on a hill. They aren't on a hill. What are they on?" (while pointing to a picture of a Tree) would not be coded as #1 or #2, but as #5. (2) Multiple statements separated by waiting periods were tallied in a "combination" category. For example, one parent corrected a child by saying "No", waiting several seconds, then saying "W. What sound does W make?", waiting several seconds, then saying in exasperation "It's 'WAS.' Now go on." This interaction would not be adequately represented by a code of #1, #4 or #6, so it was coded as a combination response.

Frequency and Range of Error Correction Tactics

Because of the prevalence of this kind of interaction, and the lack of empirical information about it, a signficant contribudon of this study is simply the description of the range and frequency of parental correction tactics. The total number of error corrections, regardless of type, ranged from .40 to 6.65 per minute of the child's reading.

Parents varied enormously in their use of corrective strategies. For example, when a child hesitated over reading a word, some parents simply repeated (up to 29 times in one session) "sound it out," but without giving the child any clues, whereas other parents never gave this particular admonition. Similarly, some parents would quickly tell the child the word (on 91 occasions in one session) before she had even begun to decode it, whereas other parents never told the child the word.

The single most common error correction tactic was simply telling the child the word. It was the predominant tactic for the first attempt at correcting the child for 16 parents, and a common secondary tactic for other parents. That is, parents using a phonics-based reductionist strategy often begin the correction episode by simply saying "No", pausing for a few seconds until the child made it clear she couldn't figure the word out, following up with a "Sound it out!" command, pausing for a few seconds until the child indicates she still can't figure the word out, at which point the parent tells the child the word. Thus, it was often used in combination responses.

The second most often used tactic was to ask the child to "sound it out," but giving the child aid in doing so. This was the predominant correction tactic of 6 parents. Simply saying "Sound it out" with no aid was the predominant tactic of 4 parents.

The error correction tactics were grouped into those representing a decoding orientation (#3 and #4, and their combinations) and those representing a semantic

orientation (#5, #6, and #7, and their combinations). Descriptive statistics for these are given in Table 1. Error corrections were calculated on absolute frequency per minute of child reading.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Parent's Error Corection Tactics

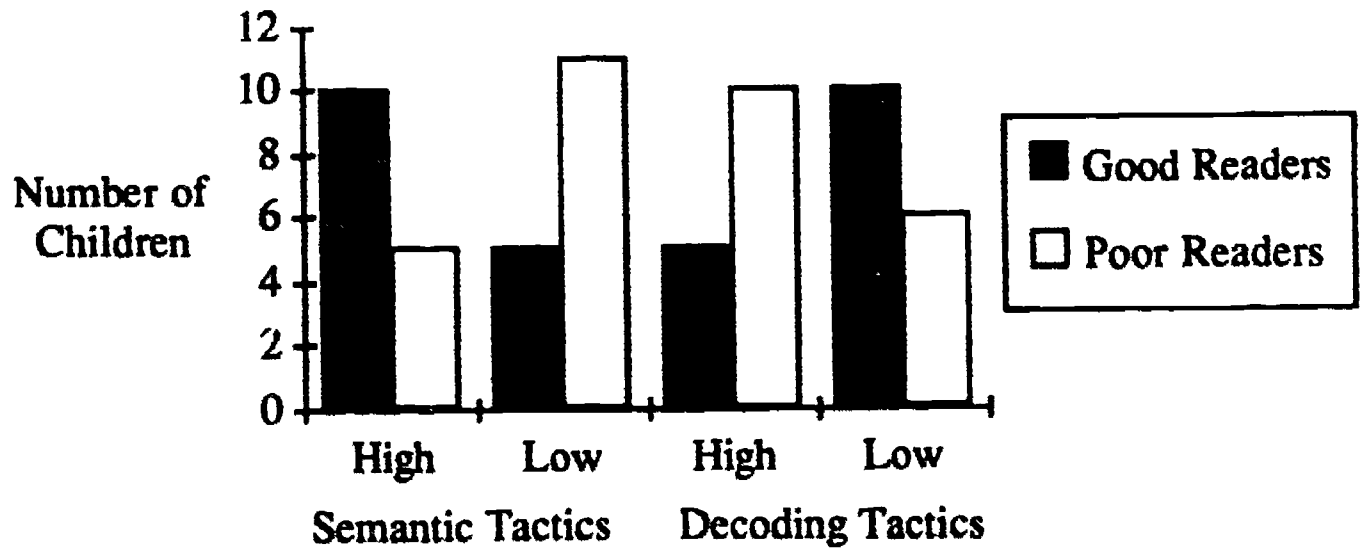
Type of Error Corrections	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Total # Error Corrections	.40	6.65	2.26	1.29
Decoding-Oriented Error Cor.	.00	1.36	.41	.42
Semantic-Oriented Error Cor.	.00	5.41	1.12	1.20

Relationship to Fluency Group

Parents were readily classifiable into being predominantly semantic or decoding oriented in the use of correction tactics. The two observers had 88% agreement on error correction grouping. Children who were early, fluent readers had parents who were below the median in the use of "decoding-oriented" tactics (t=1.59, p=.06). Conversely, children who were late, non-fluent readers tended to have parents who were below the median in the use of "semantic-oriented" tactics (t=-1.17, p=.126). See Figure 1 for a pictoral representation of this data.

Figure 1

Parent's Error Correction Tactics By Child's Fluency Group



Note. Placement in "High" or "Low" categories is based on median splits on each error-correction variable.

There is no association between the child's fluency and number of error corrections (r=.01, p=.48). These results are not, therefore, simply a by-product of late, non-fluent children receiving more corrections. It is possible that early, fluent readers covered more text, and therefore had more "chances" to be corrected, but all children presented their parents with ample opportunity to correct them during the reading process.

For analysis, we grouped the error correction tactics in two other ways. (1) "helpful, supportive" (#4 through #7) vs. "unhelpful, non-supportive" (#1 thru #3) and (2) "active" (#4,5,7) vs. "passive" (#3,6) tactics. Neither of these dimensions were related to the child's fluency level. Only 6 parents were predominantly "unhelpful" in their tactics, whereas parents divided evenly on the active/passive dimension.

Relationship to Affect Group

Which tactic parents used was also associated with the child's reading affect. Children in the most negative group had parents who were significantly higher in the use of decoding-oriented tactics than children in the other three groups (F=4.96, p=.01). The effect of use of semantic-oriented tactics is not statistically significant (F=2.1, p=.12 for all 4 affect groups). However, when the positive and neutral affect groups are pooled, these parents used more semantic-oriented tactics than parents in the two negative groups pooled (t=2.35, p=.016). As with fluency, analysis of variance reveals that there is no relationship between total number of error corrections and affect group (F=1.9, p=.15).

The relationship between parent correction tactics and both the child's fluency and affect group were similar, although the relationship between parental error correction and child's affective response to reading was more pronounced than the relationship with child's fluency group. Thus, parents high in the use of decoding-oriented tactics have children who are poor readers and particularly negative about reading. The use of semantic-oriented tactics shows the opposite trend, but the trend is not as statistically strong, presumably because the most common tactic used was a semantic one, resulting in less variance.

A striking observation was that the children whose parents used semantic-oriented tactics were able to maintain story flow. Children whose parents were decoding-oriented often labored over words to the point of losing the gist of the story. One child labored for a full minute over the word "was". This kind of disruption in the story flow was difficult for the child and boring for the researchers. It is easy to understand why such a correction approach would be associated with poor reading ability and attitudes.

Commentary on the Text

There are many studies in the literature indicating that discussion of the text during reading is effective. These studies focus on preschool children who are doing "proto-

reading" at best. The dependent variable is typically not reading ability per se, but reading related skills such as language acquisition and cognitive development. For example, Hayden & Fagan (1987) found that parents who contextualized books for their child had more print aware preschoolers. (See also Goodsitt, Raitan, & Perlmutter,1988, and Adams, 1990)

If this is an important dimension for the age group under study, it raises the possibility that joint story-book reading at home is more important than school based reading for two reasons: (1) parents can more effectively personalize and contextualize reading because they read on a one-to-one basis and they have more shared experience with their child, and (2) teachers don't stress text-level comprehension. For example, Mason (1982) observed 3rd and 4th grade classrooms. She divided reading activities into 1) word recognition, 2) word meaning, 3) text introduction, 4) reading, and 5) text discussion. Based on the literature she assumed a sequence of 3-4-5 would be the most effective teaching sequence. She laments that it was seldom used and that students spent very little time actually reading under a teacher's supervision (most of their time was spent on worksheets.)

The present study addresses whether text discussion effects 5- through 7-year-olds who are beginning readers. Based on our review of the literature (see Goodsitt et. al., 1988 and Pellegrini, 1989) and experience observing joint story-book reading, we decided to tally non-reading, but on-task parent-child comments into the categories most likely to contribute to reading development as follows:

1. Word-level Comprehension, Word Meaning
   Example: "A rut is a hole in the road"
2. Mechanics Instruction
   Example: "'!' means it's exciting."
3. Text-level Comprehension
   a. Text introduction (book is previewed or reading is prepared in some way.)
      Example: "Let's see if he went to the doctor like you did."
   b. Text Discussion
      i. Apply to the child's experience.
      Example: "You didn't have to take a nap at your school."
      ii. High Mental Demands
      Example: "Why isn't it hot under the house?"
      iii. Medium Mental Demands
      Example: "Looks more like a hen then a kitten."
      iv. Low Mental Demands
      Example: "What's that?" (a cop)
      v. Emotive (Humor)
      Example: "Oh no!" or "This is funny!" as smile or laugh
      vi. Emotive (expressions about feelings)
      Example: "I love baby animals, and my rabbit."

We tallied the number of utterances for each child and parent for each book read.

Frequency and Range of Text Commentary

The scores on total commentary (parent and child comments combined across ten categories) ranged from 0 to 58 (median = 19). Some dyads made no comment at all, while others made as many as 20 comments while reading one book. Thus, there was considerable variation in text discussion. Given that all possible comments were tallied, including simply giggling, commentary was not frequent. Parents made more comments than children. The most frequent category of parental commentary was low and medium mental demands (e.g., "What's that?"). The least frequent category was text introduction, which only 4 parents ever did, and they did it only once during the observation. The most common category for children was expressing humor (e.g., " That's funny!"). The mean number of humor-related comments was 2.9 for the 30-40 minute session, the range was 0 to 15. All other categories of children's comments, besides low and medium mental demands, had a mean below 1 with over half of the children making no comment at all.

Of the 16 dyads below the median on total commentary, 15 were below the median on parent commentary and 13 were below the median on child commentary. Thus, the total commentary score represents a reading interaction pattern and can not be explained by one member of the pair dominating the other (with 4 exceptions).

Correlation between the two observers for parents' commentary was r=.80, for children's commentary was r=.92, and for total commentary was r=.83.

Relationship to Fluency Group

The ANOVA suggested no relationship between amount of text commentary and the child's fluency group. MANOVA's run separately for child comments and parent comments similarly showed no relationship between amount of commentary and fluency.

Relationship to Affect Group

The amount of commentary by the child across all ten categories was related to reading affect (Hotellings T=2.34, p=.022). The relationship is nonlinear: A-priori contrasts show that groups 1, 2, and 3 are similar in amount of commentary, but the positive group is engaged in substantially more commentary. A similar, but non-significant trend was found for parent commentary (Hotellings T=2.02, p =.144).

Questioning

In addition to text commentary, we noted whether children questioned their parents during the reading episode. Whitehurst, Fako, Lonigan, Fischel, DeBaryshe, Valdez-Menchaca, Caulfield (1988), Many (1988) and Goodsitt et. al. (1988) found that the number of open-ended questions asked by mothers during reading was related to positive child development in toddlers. Is this a relevant dimension of interaction with beginning

readers? Unlike preschoolers, children at the age under study here were the primary question-askers. We assumed that mother's responses to those questions would reflect: (1) how effectively the parent follows the child's cue -- a measure of contingent behavior and (2) the extent to which children are allowed to monitor and control their own reading education. In "Learning to Read without a Teacher" Torrey (1969) makes the point that children who are allowed to monitor and control their own reading education (via directed questions) do well. Similarly, Whitehurst et. al. (1988) argue that it is important that mothers effectively follow the child's cue. Does the parent capitalize on incidents where the child wants to discuss the text, or try to push on?

We tallied the number of child-initiated questions and categorized the types of parents' responses as either (1) encouraging, (2) simply answering (e.g., "uh huh" was the total response), or (3) discouraging (e.g., ignoring the child, or saying "Just read and find out."). The two observers had 100% agreement on this categorization.

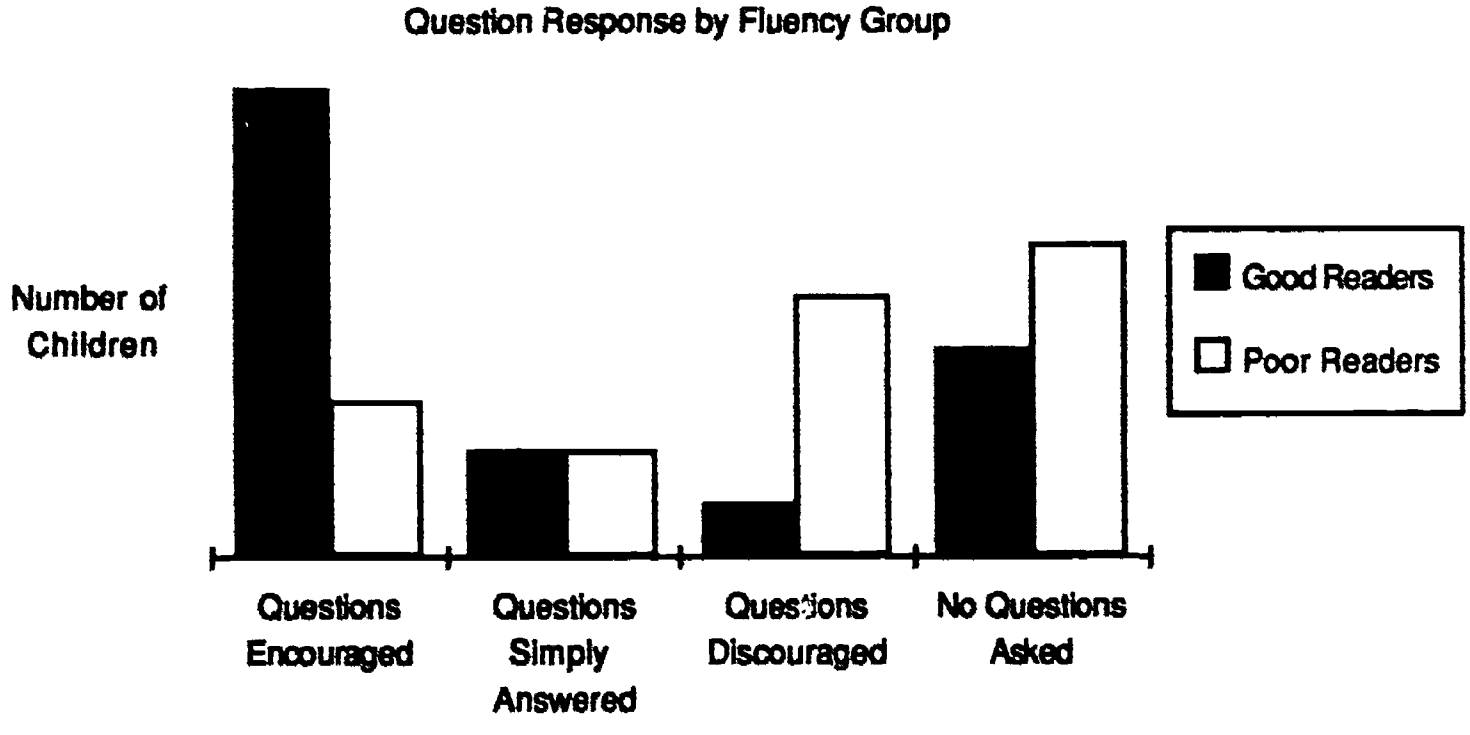
Frequency and Range of Questioning

The group range for total number of questions asked during the observation session was 0 to 8, with 23 children asking two or fewer questions. This parallels the commentary results and indicates that there is very little discussion of the text during joint story-book reading with this group. The children fell into three groups with roughly 1/3 (10) asking no questions at all, another 1/3 (12) had questions answered and elaborated on in an encouraging manner, the remaining 1/3 (10) had questions unanswered, or briefly answered and not in an encouraging manner. Only three children had one or more questions deliberately ignored. One parent ignored five questions from her child.

Relationship to Fluency Group

Chi square for number of questions asked by fluency level was 7.5 ($p = .48$). Thus, both the highest and lowest fluency groups were as likely to ask (or not ask) questions. On the other hand, how their parents responded to the questions was associated with fluency level (see Figure 2). The group of children who asked no questions were evenly divided between early, fluent and late, nonfluent readers. But for children who did ask questions, the majority (9 of 12) of those who had parents who encouraged questions were in the highest fluency groups and those whose parents discouraged questions were primarily (5 of 6) in the lower fluency groups. All three of the children whose questions were ignored were in the lowest fluency group. Conversely, only six children had three or more questions answered and elaborated on and they were all in the the top fluency groups.

Figure 2



Relationship to Affect Group

There is no relationship between the number of questions asked and the child's affect group. There may be a non-linear relationship in that half of the children who asked no questions were in the moderately negative group, the other half were distributed across the remaining three groups. There is no significant relationship between the way questions were responded to and the child's affect group (Chi Square = 10.4, p=.32). Extreme comparisons revealed the same results in that the three children who had questions unanswered were in the moderately negative (n=2) and neutral (n=1) groups. The six children who had three or more questions elaborated on were distributed across all the affect groups.

Purpose for Reading

Hayden & Fagan (1987) found that preschool children for whom reading is a meaning-getting process are more print aware and have higher proto-reading abilities. It is a logical assumption that similar effects would be seen for the age group under study. Indeed, in our initial analysis it was apparent that different goals for reading reflected the pair's enjoyment of reading (Lancy, Draper & Boyce, 1989).

In the present study we assessed purpose for reading in two ways. First, we categorized each child and each parent according to a subjective sense of their overall purpose for reading, as follows:

1. Meaning-getting process (understanding the story or plot, learning the content, etc.)
2. Having a good time (entertainment, the book is a vehicle for giggling, cuddling, etc.)
3. Learning skills (practicing sounds and words)
4. Just get through it (assigned duty, shows little interest in content, tries to finish quickly, parent says "come on" when the child initiates discussion)

The child's purpose for reading was not necessarily the same as the parent's. For example, a parent may view the child's turn to read as a time for practicing skills, whereas the child may view his/her turn to read as a time for having fun. Second, we rated both the child's and parent's overall reading style as either monotone/robotic, normal, or expressive/dramatic.

Frequency and Range of Purpose for Reading

The greatest variation in purpose occurs when the child is reading. When the parent reads, almost all pairs read for fun. Parents viewed child reading time as an opportunity for the child to have fun or an opportunity for the child to learn and/or display reading skills. Children read to "have fun" or to "[illegible]t get through it." Neither group read predominantly for meaning. The two observers agreed on 75% of the categorizations.

Each parent and child were given an overall rating of their reading style. For children this variable was not discriminating because 28 of the children read in a monotone/robotic style. For parents there was a little more range. Four parents read in a monotone/robotic style, 20 in a normal tone, and eight in an expressive/dramatic way. The two observers agreed on 75% of these ratings.

Relationship to Fluency Group

Purpose for reading is associated with children's reading fluency. The contrast for parents' purpose for reading while the child reads is given in Table 2. The Chi Square for

Table 2

Fluency Group by Parents' Purpose for Child's Reading

Parent's Purpose for Child Reading	Good Readers	Poor Readers
Having a Good Time	11	2
Learning Skills	5	14

this table is 8.29 (p=.004). Thus, good readers have parents who appear to view the child's reading as a time for entertainment, rather than skill practice. A similar finding was obtained for the child's purpose while the child reads (Chi square = 4.52, p =.03). Additionally, of the seven pairs who do not read for fun when the parent is reading none of the children are early, fluent readers.

Table 3 brings together both the child and the parents' purpose for reading and reading style in a narrative format to show how these behaviors are associated with the child's fluency grouping. Descriptions of the pairs are given in each cell. The left to right diagonal shows the most dramatic contrast in purpose for reading. The upper left cell is predominantly high fluency readers and the lower right is predominantly low fluency readers.

Table 3

Fluency Grouping Based on Purpose for Reading and Reading Style

Parent	Child: Have Fun	Child: Just Get Through It
Have Fun	Purpose for both parent and child while child reads is to have fun. Same for when parent reads. They read in either an expressive/dramatic or normal tone. **Good Readers N=10** **Poor Readers N=1**	Purpose for child when child reads is to get through the task. But for parent it is for meaning or fun, or parent is especially dramatic/expressive (i.e., parent does something fun.) **Good Readers N=2** **Poor Readers N=3**
Practice Skills	Purpose for child while child reads is meaning or fun, but for parents it is to learn skills. Parent reads in a normal or monotone style (i.e., child has gist of fun reading but parent does not.) **Good Readers N=1** **Poor Readers N=3**	Purpose for both while child reads is to learn skills or get through the task. Same for when the parents reads for seven dyads. Both read in a normal or monotone style. **Good Readers N=3** **Poor Readers N=9**

Relationship to Affect Group

The parent's purpose while the child read was also related to the child's affect group; children who had parents who emphasized reading for fun were more positive about reading (Chi Square = 6.8, p=.08). The child's purpose while he or she read showed a similar, but non-significant trend (Chi Square = 2.6, p=.45).

The parent's style of reading was not associated with the child's reading affect. In fact five of the eight parents who read in an expressive way have children in the negative or moderately negative group. While it is logical that the child's style of reading is related to the child's reading affect, there isn't enough variation in the way the child reads to do an analysis. However, three of the four children who were not monotone readers were in the positive group.

Book Selection

Another interaction, also reflecting purpose for reading, is book selection. Some 30 books ranging from *Golden Books* to controlled (Dick & Jane-style) readers to Caldecott winners were spread casually over a coffee table. After observing each pair select each book we categorized reason for book choice as:

1. Familiar and liked
2. Seems interesting, or funny, or appealing (e.g., "I want a funny one.")
3. Connoisseurship (e.g., familiar with the series or characters, likes the author)
4. Easy (e.g., "You can read all these words.")
5. Proximity (e.g., on the top of the stack)
6. No discussion
7. Unclear

In the instances where it was clear why the choice was made, children primarily choose a book because it was familiar and liked (18 instances) or because it seemed interesting or funny (9 instances). Other categories were expressed by children only four or fewer times. Parents, on the other hand, primarily choose a book because it was easy (12 instances), all other categories were expressed three or fewer times. Parents were more concerned with choosing books the child might have success with than the child was. No analysis with the dependent variables was done because of limited entries in most of the categories and most interactions being "unclear." It was interesting to us that so little discussion took place. There didn't appear to be any tacit rules or communication of reasons for book choices. It appeared to be more random than a negotiated decision or an act of connoisseurship.

CONCLUSIONS

Educators encourage parents of high-risk children to read to them, but without a sense of how that advice is carried out by different parents. Because of the importance of this kind of interaction and the lack of empirical information about it for school-aged children, a significant contribution of this study is simply the description of the range and frequency of parent and child behaviors during joint story-book reading. This study provides a picture of the variation among beginning readers and their parents during

storybook reading. The variation was striking even though the sample was from a relatively homogeneous working-class population.

One example of such striking variation was that although "expressing humor" was the most common kind of commentary made by children, some children never made such a comment , while one child made 15 such comments. Another example of wide variation is that one parent deliberately ignored five questions from her child, whereas another parent enthusiastically elaborated on eight questions asked by her child, while other children simply didn't ask any questions at all. A final example of variation in parent behavior was given in the section on error corrections: when a child hesitated over reading a word, one parent simply repeated "sound it out," but without giving the child any clues, 29 times in one session whereas other parents never gave this particular admonition. Another parent quickly told the child the word before she had even begun to decode it 91 times in one session, whereas other parents never told the child the word.

Clearly, this study indicates that how parents interpret the mandate to read to their children varies. A second purpose of this study was to suggest which aspects of that variation are associated with fluency and positive affect while reading. To summarize our results: (1) the way parents corrected reading errors, and (2) their apparent purpose for reading and reading style was associated with both the child's reading flueny and affect, and (3) the way parents responded to queries from the child was associated with fluency, and (4) the number of comments children made while reading was related to their reading affect. In other words, pairs who view the child's reading as a source of fun, keep the story flowing without letting the child get bogged down in decoding (by using semantic-oriented rather than decoding-oriented correction tactics), encourage questions about the story and express humor while reading have children who are more fluent and more positive about reading. It should be noted here that children primarily made humrous comments (e.g., "This is funny!), and no significant amount in any other comment category . The connection to positive reading affect is obvious. We might describe the profile of parent-child interaction for good readers as stressing function; they seem to operate from a motto of "reading is fun!" Conversely, parent-child interaction for poor readers stresses form; they seem to operate from a motto of "reading is work!" where storybook reading is a time for skill practice. This supports other studies in the literature that indicate a comprehension-based approach to parent-child reading is more effective than a skills-based approach.

Equally of interest are those variables that were not associated with reading fluency or affect. To summarize, (1) number of error corrections, and (2) number of questions answered, were not related to reading fluency or affect, and (3) number of comments made

while reading was not related to reading fluency. Overall, it appears that the quality of the interaction between parent, child, and book, but not the quantity is associated with positive reading ability and affect in this population. These findings are somewhat contrary to some of the published literature indicating mere quantity of interaction is predictive of reading abilities. We see two primary reasons for this apparent contradiction: (1) age, and (2) cultural background of the participants. First, the published literature focuses on preschoolers rather than school-aged subjects. DeLoache's (1984, DeLoache & Mendoza 1985) work suggests that the expansionist tactic is more characteristic of interaction with very young children. As the child grows older, attention shifts to the mechanics of reading, there is much less elaboration of and commentary on the text. A related point is that the books used in these sessions with fledgling readers were very familiar. It is possible, that had we observed some of these pairs engaged in story-book reading several years earlier, we would have seen much more commentary and mutual questioning.

A second explanation relates to the cultural background of our participants (Lancy, in press). The literature that supports the view that story-book reading is an opportunity for a great deal of teaching and learning that goes well beyond reading, has been conducted almost exclusively with upper middle-class families where the mothers were highly educated (e.g., Heath, 1982; Many, 1988; Ninio & Bruner, 1978; Snow & Goldfield, 1982,1983; Taylor, 1983). More limited research on parent-child literacy activity in working-class families (e.g., Heath, 1983; Miller et al., 1986) suggests that joint storybook reading is limited in degree and complexity. Perhaps in this sample mere quantity of interaction is not predictive of reading fluency and affect because that interaction is not always enhancing, reflecting the relative poverty of some of these parents' repertoire of storybook reading tactics.

We should note that most of the children were struggling, uncomfortable, and sometimes negative about reading, reminding us what a difficult and arduous task learning to read is. Although more children were negative than positive about reading, there was tremendous variation in the affect displayed by children while struggling through a book. While one child would pout, push herself back into the couch, cross her arms and communicate in body language "I hate this! I'm only doing it because you made me," another would eagerly grab a book, cuddle with her mother, and smile throughout the reading process.

It is also important to note that we witnessed what appeared to be well-meaning parents who actually may have damaged their children's attitude toward reading. For example, one of our late, non-fluent readers was accompanied to the session by both

parents. They clearly valued reading for their daughter and mentioned, in a follow-up interview, that they had purchased flash cards and other reading readiness aids for her. As she read, slowly, painfully, they provided a steady stream of exhortations. But, these were either of the "You can do it!" sort or were purely decoding-oriented, "When two vowels go walking...." They even went so far as to prevent the child's attempts to "construct" meaning, telling her not to "cheat by looking at the pictures." When she didn't heed this advice, her father actually placed a piece of paper over the illustration. In other words, caring, enthusiastic parents who rely entirely on decoding (or *reductionst*, Lancy, Draper & Boyce 1989) tactics may be doing their beginning reader more harm than good. These parents were trying hard to be good parents, they were conscientious, and they were not a small minority. Our findings indicate the possibility that when it comes to storybook reading "more" is not better, unless it is "more" of a particular kind of interaction. Furthermore, there is tremendous variation in parent-child joint storybook reading with this age group, and not all parents are effective coaches for their child. The findings underscore the urgent need for educators to convey more information to parents about how to be a good coach to the beginning reader, rather than just telling parents and children to read at home more.*

---

*Limitations

Support for our findings of a relationship between parent-child interaction styles and the child's fluency and enjoyment of reading would be strengthened with two design modifications. First, it would be helpful to sample across a wider class spectrum. Our sample did not include any families of the sort documented by Taylor (1983) where storybooks are central props in the drama of family life and joint-storybook reading is the glue that bonds family members together. Nor did our sample include families where the printed word is virtually non-existent (e.g , Purcell-Gates, 1991). By sampling more broadly, we would significantly increase the variance available on the independent variables. It would also be helpful to conduct a longitudinal study of children from the age of 4.5 to 7.5, to capture changes in interaction patterns as a function of the child's age and changing status as non-reader, beginning reader, and independent reader. Also, quite obviously, we would be in a much stronger position to argue that something about the interaction patterns at 4.5-6 years were influencing the child's interaction with academic reading instruction from 6-7.5 years.

References

Adams, M.J. (1990) Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Anderson, A. B., Teale, W. H., & Estrada, E. (1980). Low-income childrens' preschool literacy experiences. Some naturalistic observations. *The Quarterly Newsletter of the Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition*, 2, pp. 59-65.

DeLoach, J.S. (1984). What's This? Maternal questions in joint picture book reading with toddlers. Paper presented at 68th Annual Conference of the American Educational Research Association, New Orleans, April, ED 251176.

DeLoache, J.S., & DeMendoza, O.A.P. (1985). Joint picture book interactions of mothers and one-year old children. Technical Report No. 353, Urbana, IL, Center for the Study of Reading. ED 274-960.

Durkin, D. (1966). *Children who read early*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Elardo, R., Bardley, R., & Caldwell, B. (1975). The relation of infants' home environments to mental test performance from six to thirty-six months: A longitudinal analysis. *Child Development*, 46, pp. 71-76.

Feldman, S., Wentzel, K., Weinberger, D., Munson, J. (1990). Marital satisfaction of parents of preadolescent boys and its relationship to family and child functioning. *Journal of Family Psychology*., 4, pp. 213-234.

Goodsitt, J., Raitan J. & Perlmutter, M. (1988). Interaction between mothers and preschool children when reading a novel and familiar book. International Journal of Behavioral Development, 11, pp. 489-505.

Gordon, I. J., & Guinagh, B. J. (1974). A home learning center approach to early stimulation. Manuscript, Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Institute for the Development of Human Resources.

Hayden, H., & Fagan, W. (1987). Keeping it in context: Strategies for enhancing literacy awareness. First Language, 7, pp. 159-171.

Heath, S.B. (1982). What no bedtime story means: Narrative skills at home and school. Language in Society, 11, 49-76.

Heath, S.B. (1983). Ways With Words. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Irwin, O. C. (1960). Infant speech: Effect of systematic reading of stories. *Journal of Speech and Hearing Research*, 3, pp. 187-190.

Lancy, D. F. (1992) *Qualitative Research in Education*. White Plains, NY: Longman

Lancy, D. F. (in press) Cultural perspectives on literacy and numeracy. In T. Husen & T.N. Postlethwaite (Ed.s.) *The International Encyclopedia of Education*. London: Pergamon. 2nd edition.

Lancy, D. F., Draper, K. D., Boyce, G. (1989). Parental influence on children's acquisition of reading. *Contemporary Issues in Reading*, 4 (1), 83-93.

Lancy, D. F. & Zupsic, A.B. (1991) A case study of **Running Start**. paper presented at a conference on Family and School Support for Early Literacy, Toledo, May.

Many, J. E. (1988). Interactions About Text and Pictures: A Discourse Analysis. Paper presented at AERA, April in New Orleans.

Mason, J. (1982) A description of reading instruction: The tail is wagging the dog. Reading Education Report, No. 35.

Miller, P., Memorial, A., & DeJong, J. (1986). Early reading at home: Its practice and meaning in a working class community. In Schiefflin, B. B., and Gilmore, P. (eds.). The Acquisition of Literacy: Ethnographic Perspectives. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 3-15.

Ninio, A., & Bruner, J.S. (1978). The achievement and antecedents of labelling. Journal of Child Language, 5, 5-15.

Pellegrini, A., Perlmutter, J., Galda, L., & Brody, G. (1989). Joint bookreading between black head start children and their mothers. Institute for Behavioral Research.

Purcell-Gates, V. (1991). Emergent Literacy in a non literate home: Problems and issues paper presented at Conference on Family and School Support for Early Literacy, Toledo, May.

Snow, C.E., & Goldfield, B.A. (1982). Building stories: The emergence of information structures from conversation. In D. Tannen, (ed.), Analyzing discourse: Text and Talk. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 127-141.

Snow, C.E., & Goldfield, B.A. (1983). Turn the page please: Situation-specific language acquisition. Journal of Child Language, 10, 551-569.

Taylor, D. (1983). Family Literacy, Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Teale, W. H. (1978). Positive learning environments for learning to read: What studies of early readers tell us. *Language Arts*, 55, pp. 922-932.

Teale, W. H. (1986). Home background and young children's literary development. In William H. Teale and Elizabeth Sulzby (Ed.s.). *Emergent literacy: writing and reading*, Norwood, NJ: Ablex, pp. 173-206.

Teale, W. H. (1987). Factors related to reading performance. Emergent literacy: Reading and writing development in early childhood. Paper presented at the Sixth Annual University of Wisconsin Reading Symposium on Factors Related to Reading Performance, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee.

Teale, W. H., Estrada, E., & Anderson, A. B. (1981). How preschoolers interact with written communication. Manuscript, Laboratory of Comparative Human Cognition, University of California, San Diego.

Torrey, J. (1969). Learning to read without a teacher: A case study. Elementary English, pp. 550-556,658.

Wachs, T. D., Uzgiris, I. C., & Hunt, J. M. (1971). Cognitive development in infants of different age levels and for different environmental backgrounds: An exploratory investigation. *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, 17, pp. 283-318.

Walker, G. H., & Kuerbitz, I. E. (1979). Reading to preschoolers as an aid to successful beginning reading. *Reading Improvement*, 16, pp. 149-154.

Wells, G. (1981). Some antecedents of early educational attainment. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 2, pp. 181-200.

Wells, G. (1985). Preschool literacy-related activities and success in school. In David R. Olson, Nancy Torrance, (Eds.), *Literacy, Language and Learning*. Cambridge University Press (229-255).

Whitehurst, G., Fischel, J., Arnold, D., Lonigan, C., Valdez-Menchaca, M., & Caulfield, M. (1989). Intervening in early shared book reading: Scripts vs. direct training. Paper presented at the biennial meeting of the Society for Research in Child Development, Kansas City.

Whitehurst, G., Fako, F., Lonigan, C., Fischel, J., DeBaryshe, B., Valdez-Menchaca, M., & Caulfield, M. (1988). Developmental Psychology, 24, pp. 552-559.